

Report to:	TOURISM ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Relevant Officer:	Mr John Greenbank, Senior Democratic Governance Adviser (Scrutiny)
Date of Meeting:	6 October 2021

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ARTS AND CULTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To update on the work undertaken by scrutiny members on the review of the impact of Covid-19 on Arts and Culture in Blackpool.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 That representatives from a cross section of cultural organisations and self-employed creatives be invited to a dedicated meeting where they can discuss with members how Covid-19 has impacted on their ability to deliver their offer to audiences, customers and participants and impact on their sustainability.

2.2 That on the information gathered from the cultural sector in Blackpool and discussions with key national partners such as the Arts Council, the Scrutiny Review Panel recommend that a new Blackpool Cultural Partnership with the key task of producing a Blackpool Cultural Plan, be established.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure the Committee has an overview of ongoing work in relation to arts and culture.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

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- 6.10 Ms Carolyn Primmet, informed the review panel that as part of work to understand the impact of Covid-19 that the Heritage Action Zone had been surveyed by the cultural organization Aunty Social on behalf of the Council with support from Abingdon Studios.
- 6.11 The survey had highlighted the broad range of cultural and artistic groups and individuals as well as highlighting a desire among them to promote local talent and ideas.
- 6.12 In order to help facilitate this the Council has undertaken a project to open a Creative Hub on Topping Street to provide a space for creative businesses operate from and for providing signposting to groups and individuals seeking support.
- 6.13 The Council was also looking at the establishment of Live-Work spaces for artists in the Town Centre. This would allow creatives to live and work close to where their output would be displayed and give access to people visiting the town.
- 6.14 Attendance at theatres and the larger venues in Blackpool was discussed, with the Panel querying attendance figures, noting that attendance a Blackpool Football Club's matches had been good. In response it was explained that predicting attendance at theatres and other venues was complicated by changes in ticket purchasing behavior. Since the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions the purchase of tickets had often taken place closer to the time of performances. This was believed to be the result of patrons waiting to see if Covid-19 would impact on a performance taking place. However it was
- 6.15 Ms Primett also reported that the Arts Council had ring-fenced funding for Blackpool, in recognition of its cultural diversity. This would allow businesses and groups priority access to grant funding. It was also noted that Blackpool was only one of seven areas that had received such benefits in the North West. In order to support this the Council had sought to develop a Cultural Partnership to develop a Cultural Plan that would outline a vision for Blackpool.
- 6.16 The review panel noted the importance of a partnership having buy-in and leadership from Blackpool's artistic community, which would ensure that the vision outlined was that of local creatives and cultural organisation. It was further understood that should buy-in would strengthen funding grants and support from the Arts Council.
- 6.17 Without a partnership it was considered that there was a risk that Blackpool's cultural offer would become disjointed which would be detrimental to those seeking funding opportunities. A Cultural Plan would also help show where artists and groups would fit into Blackpool's wider cultural offer.

6.18 The role of arts and culture can play in the economic development was also discussed. Members expressed the view that work was needed to link up cultural venues. IN order to achieve this the Panel was informed that work had been undertaken with the Council's Growth and Prosperity Team to ensure that promotion of artistic and cultural venues was included in the Blackpool Town Deal.

6.19 The low rate of funding application rate from Fylde Coast artists and cultural organisations was noted with the Panel being made aware that 71% had made no funding applications. Mr Legg explained that this suggested a lack of awareness among certain groups but also that many artists, although professional, did not possess qualifications or certifications. This could make it difficult for them to meet official criteria for funding applications. Discussion had therefore taken place with the Arts Council to determine how such individuals could access support and the establishment of a Creative Hub would assist in helping signpost support artists. Ms Primett also stated that a number of artists were eligible for the Self-Employed Support Grant, which had been made available during Covid-19. Although not specifically aimed at artists, as self-employed individuals they could benefit from its funding.

6.20 Officers recommended that the Scrutiny Review Panel meet with representative of cultural organisation to discuss their experiences of Covid-19 and how it has impacted the delivery of their offer. The Panel members welcomed this recommendation and asked if it would be possible for site visit to studios and other venues to discuss work with representative and gain the necessary understanding of the challenges they are facing.

6.21 The Review Panel agreed the following;

- That representatives from a cross section of cultural organisations and self-employed creatives be invited to a dedicated meeting where they can discuss with members how Covid-19 has impacted on their ability to deliver their offer to audiences, customers and participants and impact on their sustainability.
- Based on the information gathered from the cultural sector in Blackpool and discussions with key national partners such as the Arts Council, the Scrutiny Review recommends that a new Blackpool Cultural Partnership with the key task of producing a Blackpool Cultural Plan, be established.

6.22 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

7.1 None.

7.2 Financial considerations:

7.3 Details of granting funding for the arts and culture sector in Blackpool are provided at section 6.7 of the report.

8.0 Legal considerations:

8.1 None.

9.0 Risk management considerations:

9.1 None.

10.0 Equalities considerations:

10.1 None.

11.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

11.1 There were no sustainability, climate change or environmental considerations raised at the review panel meeting.

12.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

12.1 None.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None.